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*Exploring Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical, Theological, and Historical Studies.* Edited by Anna Marmodoro and Neil B. McLynn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xi + 263.

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This volume of edited papers is the fruit of a seminar on Gregory of Nyssa convened in Oxford in 2016. Aside from the introductory chapter, there are eleven papers from scholars known for their research in early Christianity, particularly of this Cappadocian Bishop of the late fourth century. As the editors point out in their introduction, there is not a common thread joining these papers together save for the shared focus on Gregory of Nyssa. Instead, a group of scholars variously concerned with Gregory's historical, philosophical, and theological setting have been given latitude to present their own research interests. As such, the editors have rightly decided to forego a concluding chapter, as it would prove futile to try to draw these disparate papers together. Readers hoping for a cohesive monograph on some aspect of Gregory of Nyssa's life and work will be rightly disappointed. The trade-off for this disappointment is a collection of engaging papers from recognized scholars in Nyssen studies.

The volume opens with some historical chapters. The first essay by John Anthony McGuckin is largely contextual. In his engaging and laconic prose, McGuckin situates Gregory as a hierarch, philosopher, exegete, and theologian. Although Gregory's biographical details (his family, his participation in councils, his travels) are known in broad strokes, the details of various aspects of his life are gleaned in a tentative manner from his own writings. Neil McLynn's essay on Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus is a fascinating exploration of the relationship between these two figures outside of their relationship to Basil of Caesarea (the older brother of Nyssen and friend of Nazianzus). Much is

known about the sometimes-fraught relationship between Basil and the two Gregories – Nyssen lived under the shadow of his dominant older brother and took it upon himself to be his theological heir when Basil died, and Nazianzus, always the reluctant public figure, was cajoled into a bishopric in Sasima by Basil. While the relationship between Nyssa and Nazianzus is only hinted at in a handful of letters between the two, McLynn offers an engaging analysis of their career trajectories. Although Nyssa began his career in his brother's shadow – often frustrating Basil with his political missteps – he developed into an active and trusted defender of Nicene orthodoxy, traveling many places to ensure that trinitarian Christianity (as defined at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE) was maintained in areas where heterodox beliefs may have gained a foothold. Susanna Elm's chapter on Gregory's *Life of Moses* begins by providing some historical background on the debates within Roman society about dress and what it communicated about people. In Gregory's allegorical approach, to be dressed as Scythian (i.e. as a barbarian) connotes the predatory inclinations of heresy, whereas the dress of the hoplite (i.e. girded for battle) was equated with the priestly vestments described in the *Life of Moses*. Elm insists that the primary focus of the work is that of heavenly ascent, but that clothing had a beneficial metaphorical purpose of communicating the pursuit of the virtuous life.

The following chapters focus on Gregory's philosophical contributions. The influence of Origen of Alexandria and the greater platonic discourse is a recurring theme, and McGuckin highlights this in his chapter, "Gregory Interprets Scripture as a Not-Uncritical Disciple of Origen" (23). Mark Edwards's "Origen and Gregory of Nyssa on the Song of Songs" and Christopher Beeley's "Gregory of Nyssa's Christological Exegesis" are two chapters which show the continuity and discontinuity of Origen and Gregory's thought – the former with respect to their commentaries

on the Song of Songs, and the latter with their Christologies. For Edwards, Origen's interpretation is of a "bodiless Scripture," whereas Gregory's avowal of the incarnate Christ throughout his commentary grounds his interpretation in the physical world (even if he, too, interprets Song of Songs allegorically). Beeley highlights the similarities of their Christologies, a dualism worried about the contamination of God by the human sufferings of Jesus, which downplays Christ's fear and pain over his triumph over the power of death.

The debate about the interplay of Platonism and Christianity in Gregory is certainly still alive. It has been noted that the taxonomy of Gregory's metaphysics can be framed in two ways. Those who view Gregory as more of a Platonist than a Christian thinker tend to prioritize the categories of Intelligible and Sensible over those of Created and Uncreated. The reverse is true for those who emphasize Gregory's Christian identity over his putative Platonism. Ilaria Ramelli provides a synopsis of scholarly contestations of this question in her chapter, "Gregory of Nyssa on the Soul (and the Restoration)." Here, she ultimately asserts that the Platonic distinction is fundamental to Gregory's thought, and applies it in his "Christianized Platonic psychology based on the theology of the image, developed in the theology of freedom, and culminating into a holistic ideal of resurrection-restoration" (141). Johannes Zachhuber, on the other hand, argues that Platonic psychologies are of limited use in discussing Gregory's theory of the soul (particularly in his more mature work), and instead proposes an understanding of the soul in terms of *dynamis*, or, as Zachhuber frames it, "the question of what the soul is thus far became transformed into the question of what it is *with respect to the body* and what, through the body and together with it, the soul does and effects for the human being" (144).

The next two chapters are more practical, focusing on the theoretical basis of Christian formation. They serve as a useful reminder that, although Gregory is variously known as theologian and philosopher, he was also a Bishop in the Church whose function was the spiritual care of the people in his congregations – a notion which was also brought forward in Elm’s chapter where she highlighted Moses’s clothing as a symbol of taking on the virtuous life. Morwena Ludlow highlights Christian formation in the light of Gregory’s concept of the body-soul relationship. True Christian formation happens when body and soul act in complete harmony. The perfect example of this is the incarnate Christ who serves not only as an example but as the one who re-shapes believers into his image. The risk of disharmony between body and soul leads to badly formed believers, who, through lack of co-operation with divine action, can be hypocrites (appearing to be good) or bad copies of the good form and thus demonstrably malformed. Sophie Cartwright explores the idea of human vulnerability in the context of realizing complete freedom. She highlights both physical and psychological vulnerability – the realization that we are reliant on things from outside of ourselves for survival and that we are also mortal. Any authority exercised over creation happens within a framework of co-operation. The fact that we cannot even attain self-mastery indicates we should not be masters over anyone else. To realize the complete freedom to which we are called requires that we acknowledge our interdependency.

The last two papers are more strictly theological and are concerned with Gregory’s *To Ablabius* (also known as *On Not Three Gods*). Andrew Radde-Gallwitz’s chapter proposes a model of the Trinity he calls “intentional action,” to counter the interpretation of Gregory in *To Ablabius* as tritheistic. In this model, the Trinity is portrayed in dynamic terms: the Spirit is the agent, the Son is the power, and the Father is the intentionality. Radde-Gallwitz’s

proposal is provocative, to say the least, and he does not claim that Gregory would reject the notion of joint activity (three agents acting in complete harmony). Anna Marmodoro, on the other hand, sees *To Ablabius* as Gregory's attempt to address the long-standing philosophical problem of the one and the many. Drawing upon Plato's analogy of gold in the *Timaeus* as one and many, she argues that Gregory offers a unique solution in applying different arithmetics (mass and count). In the case of gold, there is one thing called "gold" encapsulating all gold, and this gold can be struck into numerous coins. The number of coins does not affect the amount of gold in total. Gregory correlates this to human nature in which the "nature of man remains one independently of the number of men that participate in it" (229). Without delving into the minutiae of how Marmodoro traces Gregory's argument, we see how the analogy of gold is applied to human nature, which is then referred to the divine nature, "the nature of man is the totality of men in the world; the nature of gold is the totality of golden artefacts in the world. Applied to the Trinity, this theory enables Gregory to hold that the nature of God is one, and it is the total quantity of what is divine in the world. What is divine in the world are the Persons of the Trinity, who are three in our apprehension only, from the perspective of their differentiation by the peculiar qualities" (234).

There is much to digest in this volume. One of its chief benefits is the gateway it offers into the work of these scholars, for many of the chapters seem to be developments of these writers' academic interests. It offers some broadly contextual studies which may help someone who is new to the field of Gregory of Nyssa, and it also provides some rigorous and provocative research focused on pertinent issues in Nyssen studies.